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ABSTRACT

This document presents a review of the proceedings of the Cornell Conference on the Future of Female Studies, which was held at Cornell University on May 10, 1972. Participants in the conference included faculty members from Cornell as well as faculty members from other prominent colleges and universities in the U. S. and abroad. General topics and courses discussed were: cross-cultural studies; Marriage and the Protestant Reformation; the opportunity structure of housewifery; the historic of domesticity; sex structure and class structure; women in literature; inequality and modernization; male-female roles; and achievement and self-esteem. (HS)

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Report of Female Studies Conference

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The Cornell Conference on the Future of Female Studies was held on campus May 10. Here is the report on the conference filed by Miss Sheila Tobias, assistant to the vice president for academic affairs.

There was a difference of opinion at the Cornell Conference on the Future of Female Studies as to whether courses and research on women should be done in a separate program or by discipline, but all were agreed that the study of women has been woefully neglected in all fields.

Twelve professors from other universities joined the staff of Human Development and Family Studies (HD & FS) 390, the new course on "Female Personality" in a one-day discussion of "Female Studies." In addition to bringing the Cornell participants up-to-date on what is going on elsewhere, the consultants offered specific suggestions as to how to identify faculty interest in areas pertaining to women and to male-female relations, and how to mount a coordinating effort in this field.

At the end, it was generally agreed that the teaching staff of HD & FS 390 would try to find out what sections of courses, if any, and what research now underway at Cornell, if any, pertains to women; that a coordinating office would arrange occasional or continuing faculty seminars on subjects related to research on women; that more guests would be brought to the campus from other universities where new courses and programs are underway; and that links with the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR) and with the College of Human Ecology extension would be broadened.

The Program

Professors Harold Feldman and Ethel L. Vatter reported that the College of Human Ecology has requested in its budget for 1971-72 funds for research in an area to be called: "Occupational Choices and Re-Entry for Women." The research undertaken with these funds, should they be approved, Professor Vatter explained, would bear directly on employment patterns and employment images of women. The research effort, then, might be considered one of several sections of a "Program in Female Studies."

Additional courses, Sheila Tobias, lecturer in HD & FS 390, reported, are already being requested by students who completed 390 and those who plan to take it next spring. Advanced work in literature, history, sociology, psychology or any combination of these disciplines requires some sponsoring participation by members of the regular faculty. Such cooperation is currently being sought. At other universities, courses in areas pertaining to women have also been offered for the first time. Miss Tobias has syllabi from San Diego State College, Northwestern, Kansas University, Princeton, Douglass, Toronto, St. Catherine, Bryn Mawr, Berkeley, Chapel Hill, Irvine, Univ. of Chicago School of Business Administration and American University, Columbia and Goucher. By next year, she predicts there will be hundreds of courses offered.

Cross-Cultural Studies

Mrs. Jane M. Camhi, associate in the Center for International Studies (CIS) reported that the population dimension and the possibilities for cross-cultural studies causes the Center to be interested particularly in international research in the area. She also reported briefly on HD & FS 390 in the absence of Mrs. Joy D. Osofsky, the sponsor of the course. There were 203 students enrolled of whom 25 per cent were from the Arts College, 10 per cent were graduate students and 15 per cent were males and the rest were from Human Ecology. Among the educational innovations in the course were the use of a readings-journal, the absence of exams, the option of three or four credits, the weekly meetings of the course organizers and the use of a team of lecturers. Course evaluations were taken throughout and are available to interested outsiders.

Then the consultants gathered at a long table at the head of the Martha Van Rensselaer Auditorium where the meeting was taking place and, individually, told the Cornell audience what kind of academic work on women is being done at their respective institutions.

Marriage and the Reformation

Professor Elizabeth Farians, Religion, Chicago University, reported on her interest in courses such as "The Ethics of Sexual Morality." Professor Natalie Davis, History, University of Toronto, explained that she was drawn to the history of women through her interest in the Protestant Reformation. Although the Reformation had sex and marriage as its central focus, she said, she found no one studying this at all. Since then, she has collected a bibliography on the Reformation and women and another on witchcraft. She is also interested in youth in history, and notes that until now the focus of historical studies of youth has been on young men exclusively.

Professor Davis warned that sources in the history of women, particularly in early modern European history, will be a problem as will methodology. There are, she calculates, only three American historians studying women right now: herself, Professor Nancy Roelker at Tufts and Professor Robert Lopez at Yale.

Professor Kay Boals, Politics, Princeton, defines "modernization" in the Third World as, in part, the "transformation of human relationships." Hence she originated a course on "The Politics of Male-Female Relations" at Princeton this past semester and will teach a large lecture course next year on modernization using male-female relations as her case study. Her notion is that courses in female studies ought to have a

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The Opportunity Structure of Housewifery

Professor Rose Coser, Sociology, Stony Brook, is interested in women as part of her work in the sociology of the family. She does not see female studies as a separate discipline, rather as part of the subject of distribution and allocation of human resources. She would ask, what are the opportunity structures and the rewards of any given occupation, including housewifery?

Professor Kate Millett, English, Barnard, who had given one lecture this spring in HD & FS 390, told the group that a women's liberation curriculum committee at Columbia is devising tentative syllabi in a number of different fields. Sidney Abbott (City Planning, Columbia) and Amy Hackett, an instructor in German history at Columbia accompanied Miss Millett and talked about these projects. Kate Millett's own course at Bryn Mawr next year will cover such subjects as: status of women; images of women; madness in women's functions of norms and normalcy; critique of accepted views of women by Freud, Erikson and Parsons.

The History of Domesticity

Professor William Taylor, History, Stony Brook, has 14 graduate students doing studies in the history of women, including a comparison of Swedish and American feminism, intellectual history of women, and a study of what men have written about female sexuality. Professor Taylor's own book, "The History of Domesticity in the 19th Century" is nearly complete.

Professor Lois Hoffman, Psychology, University of Michigan, reported on three doctoral dissertations done recently at Michigan on the subject of achievement motivation in women. She is herself interested in the socialization of women, in their motivations to avoid success and their reasons for having more than two children. Most achievement motivation studies, she reported, are done only on boys, because the results with girls confound the data.

Sex Structure and Class Structure

Professor Jill Conway, History, University of Toronto, has studied the effects of higher education on the social roles of the first generation of women graduates in North America. Her tentative conclusions are that these women were defeated in their life goals because they continued to perceive themselves in romantic, 19th Century ways. She is now working on a history of the social sciences and is interested in Marxist and Freudian concepts of consciousness. She considers studies of sex structure quite as important as studies of class structure in history.

Professor Conway pointed out that from the methodologies developed to study women in history, may come ideas on ways to study other minorities, and colonized peoples.

Women in Literature

Professor Alice Cooper Crozier, English, Douglass College, reported on the recent decision by the Douglass faculty not to go co-ed or co-ordinate with Rutgers, but rather to commit itself to remaining a single-sex institution and to doing a better job of educating women. Hence Douglass is looking not simply at courses in female studies and at research on women, but at ways of altering the whole college in these directions. Several new courses on the subject will be mounted at once next year, she reported, of which only the syllabus of the course on women in literature is ready for distribution.

Professor Andree Michel, Sociology, Paris and Ottawa, the author of several books on the status of women in France, is testing the Parsonian thesis that the family is functional only insofar as there is clear sex-role differentiation and segregation by sex. Her tentative conclusions based on studies of working class families in France is that Parsons is wrong.

Mary Schwartz, Social Work School, SUNY at Buffalo, teaches a course called "Women and Social Policy" at the School of Social Work. She is interested in sex typing biases implicit in most of the training given social and family counsellors. She reported that a study she has made of social work manuals and texts reveals a strong bias in favor of equating the "normal" family with the one in which the male dominates.

Workshop No. 1

Professor Milton Esman, Director of the Center for International Studies, chaired the workshop. There was consensus on the following:

Inequality and Modernization

Whether you treat the status of women as a special problem or part of larger problems such as inequality or modernization, a new approach is needed that concentrates on the variable of male-female relations. For example: to what extent are values defined as male or female? What is the relationship between capitalism and the status of women? Socialism, etc.? What are the implications of full employment for sex-role change (e.g. Japan)? What are the implications of greater equality on management theory? What image of women is reflected in public policy formulation and how accurately does it reflect the needs and desires of women?

What happens in periods of violent social change to the roles women play? Why, despite the awareness of deprivation and the promise of change held out by revolution and the prominent place occupied by women in revolutions, have women usually resumed the status held before the revolution after it is over?

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Male-Female Roles

There was also consensus that at a time when men and women want to change their styles of life, it is necessary to examine the ways in which the structures of various societies reinforce traditional male-female roles.

Professor Esman reported to the conference at large later on that, in his opinion, an undergraduate program in any of these areas is "intellectually feasible."

Two Kinds of Research

To acquire base-line data on existing conditions, one can use the considerable data in operation on population studies. In addition, one needs to collect data on how women perceive their role as decision-makers even in regard to having children. Also needed are comparative analyses of social change as it is occurring; on the variable of education and how it affects the role and status of women in both developing and developed nations.

Not resolved was whether or not one could study women as a social class. Professor Coser argued that since almost every women is married to a man, woman's status is acquired through her husband. Nor, she said, is the model of caste operational.

All agreed that a research priority is population and fertility control.

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Workshop No. 2

It was agreed that women's studies programs must not fall into the authoritarian patterns of most classroom work. Because women have been an "out-group" they have developed different styles from men and a shared consciousness. Women's studies also must be truly coeducational, in that women students participate *actively*.

There was a discussion of sexism and established religions with suggestions for research into church hierarchy and structures; the theological underpinnings of women's oppression; effects of religion on domestic life; ethics and values; common law systems; study of marriage as a state institution; contemporary sexual politics in the Roman and other churches.

New Criticism in Literature

Female studies programs should study literature from the perspective of social and cultural criticism. There should be studies of female characters and their treatment, and studies of female writers. One might ask why women have confined themselves to the less exhalted literary genres, the notebook, the journal. What is the meaning of "trivial" in regard to women writers? Of "sentimental"? What is the relation between male subjects, the male culture, and the ambivalence of men about literature? What are the patriarchal archetypes in literature? Images of women in literature? Does colonial literature parallel female literature?

Innovations in teaching women in literature would include comparative techniques: one era and several literatures; British literature about the colonies; Southern literature on race and on women.

The Arts

Women in the art world are spectators, dilletantes and patrons. Why are women in school encouraged to study the arts, a "feminine field," and then resented as participants in the art world?

Workshop No. 3

This workshop chaired by Dean Alfred E. Kahn tried to articulate what the conference was seeking to accomplish and decided that what is needed is a different perspective on history, economics and politics, because what we are getting now is incomplete; also needed is an experience for female students comparable to the one that black studies has given black students, an experience of looking at their own group in an historical and political way; and a greater balance on the faculty of professors, male and female, interested and sensitive to the problems faced by women.

Professor Carolyn W. Sharif was especially interested in any ways that "female studies" might develop new methedologies of use to the social sciences. Professor Davis and others thought that any successful interdisciplinary venture linking literature, history, political science and the behavioral sciences, for instance, would make academic and pedagogical history. Professor Conway commented that professors interested in minority problems, colonial power relationships, and child development must be interested in female studies as a continuation and case study for those fields.

Conservation of human resources was discussed as were the advantages or disadvantages of a program emphasizing 'female' over a program emphasizing 'sex-roles.' Professor Davis said females in the role of oppressors, might be worth studying too.

Workshop No. 4

Professor Hoffman thought that much serious research is needed because so much of the recent literature is only passionate and not sufficiently objective and critical. She noted that some very good material has been done recently, particularly on infant sex-differences, but that it hasn't yet been published.

"We do know," Professor Hoffman said cautiously, "that girls are a little more sensitive to heat and touch just after birth and boys can raise their heads earlier. We are also studying the effects of hormones on emotions and we know that women have a different hormonal structure. We are also collecting information on sex abnormalities, but information on intelligence, affective needs and achievements are very confused with socialization. We need much more information before we rewrite guidance materials," she concluded.

Someone suggested that pre-medical students and education majors should be required to study female personality. The groups listed some specific ways in which a sensitivity to female problems, if not absolute data, could be made available to counsellors, extension agents, and, through the media, to the average person in the state.

Achievement and Self Esteem

Professor Hoffman challenged the often repeated parallel between blacks and females. Professor Hoffman thinks it is overstated. She feels that women's real problem is that they have been sold the idea that to have high self-esteem they must behave in a way that is dysfunctional for success. Meanwhile, men's self-esteem is so entirely linked up with occupational success that men have no alternative route to positive self-esteem. This, in turn, forces a woman to hold off on her own occupational success (even if it is within her grasp) so

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as to bolster her husband. She ascribes third and fourth babies to this syndrome.

Conclusions

The organizers of the conference decided to spend more time identifying interest at Cornell among the faculty; to prepare the syllabus for an advanced course to be given in the fall; and to formulate specific research proposals, in the coming months.

A questionnaire is being sent this week to all faculty members in an attempt to identify interest in the area of female studies.